All over America, families sit and watch TV commercials about the wonders of high speed broadband Internet access, all the while knowing that no cable company and no telco is going to give them a chance to experience such a thing. Why? Because the costs associated with running cable and land-based telco wiring make it economically undesirable to run expensive infrastructure to low density population areas. About the only way they are going to get such access in the present and in the future is though a wireless infrastructure, because wireless technologies allow relatively inexpensive equipment to do the job of expensive wires and cables.

And wireless technologies implemented by many of this country's Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPs) do a remarkable job of connecting vast areas of rural America to the markets, resources and educational opportunities the Internet has to offer. Thus far the WISPs have done a remarkable job of getting along together and sharing the sliver of bandwidth they were given secondary rights to. They have used what little they were given as an afterthought to connect millions of users to the Internet that just a year ago where thought nearly impossible.

But unlicensed bandwidth is a problem. You see, the government auctioned off the spectrum to the highest bidder and those that have made the investment in buying a piece of the spectrum want big returns on their slice of what rightly belongs to everyone. (Isn't selling off spectrum a bit like selling off a National Park?) What this means is that large investments are required to work in licensed spectrum space and large investments require large returns. Even after all the auctions and spending, you will find that more people connect wirelessly to the Internet through a local WISP that through those large bidders that are supposed to be using the spectrum for the good of all. WISPs are out there every day, connecting customers on hilltops and prairies, using what little space they have as second-class users of a band to connect more people than all the licensed providers combines.

So, rural America depends on WISPs to bring them a service that no one else will, and along comes articles like this http://www.arrl.org/news/stories/2003/01/10/3/?nc=1, wherein the Ham radio community points out that they are the primary users of the band most WISPs use and if they feel like blasting out 1500watts of power over a WISPs 4watts of power, the WISP had better shut down and go off the air while the ham is using the band. So, little Tommy doesn't get to research his school report tonight because some ham decides to broadcast live streaming video of his aquarium. This is good use of spectrum? Wipe out whole areas of Internet users so that one person can play with his radio? (BTW: I am a ham myself, but I can't stand by and watch this)

To paraphrase another WISP operator:

I'm all for Ham radio and emergency communications and lord knows I've paid my fair share of "emergency communications" expense as I pay my telco bills. But what is more important? The motives and resulting benefits to our nation from ISP's using 2.4? Or Ham operators? Or even take that one step further. Just plain ISP's or Ham operators?

Who keeps the public more informed - ISP's or Ham's? Who provides more education - ISP's or Ham's? How many folks have found jobs on the Internet verses Hinternet? The Internet saves lives too you know! How many millions have read WebMD, etc. for info on how to improve health or cope with disease? Or prompt them to see a doctor after reading health information? There is no telling how many lives the Internet touches each day. But it must be orders of magnitude away from peace-time Ham operations, who I'm sure do respective good works, don't get me wrong. Hams are great guys! But they shouldn't see themselves as "good guys" in this matter of blasting a whole wi-fi industry out of the water (if that is indeed the result).

Thank you for your time,
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